

Michael Libbee
Public testimony
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My name is Michael Libbee. I am co-coordinator of the Michigan Geographic Alliance, a Professor of Geography at Central Michigan University, and a past president of the National Council for Geographic Education. I have been working actively at the state and national level on geography education and school reform since 1989, including being the National Geographic Society's commuting Geographer in Residence for a year and a half. I have also helped establish the Connie Binsfeld Endowment for Geography Education and since 1989 have generated approximately fifteen thousand dollars a month of non-Michigan taxpayer support for geography and social studies education in Michigan. I am here to testify about the proposed high school core curriculum requirements, especially in the social studies.

Several weeks ago the Michigan Geographic Alliance sent a mildly humorous questionnaire to principals across the state concerning the serious topic of the proposed changes in high school core requirements. Six hundred letters were sent out, and 189 principals responded, for more than a 30% return. The results are attached.

The results of the survey show several clear trends:

- Michigan high schools require significantly more than the minimum half credit of civics. Most high schools require 3 credits (six semesters) of social studies. Michigan high schools have responded to the content standards and benchmarks in fairly consistent and appropriate ways. The most common pattern is to require a semester of Civics/Government, a year of American History, a semester of Economics/Consumer Economics, and a semester of either World Geography or Global Issues. The good news is that the strategy of establishing content standards, pushing decision making down to the district level, and using assessment to evaluate achievement has worked.
- Even though there are no significant world history content standards, many districts integrate world history components into the 6th and 7th grade eastern and western hemisphere middle school courses and 20th century world history into high school American History.
- Principals strongly indicate the importance of having flexibility in developing the curriculum to fit the needs of their students and the abilities and constraints of their staff.

The state legislature has an excellent chance to work within the recommendations of the Michigan Board of Education and the State Superintendent to improve the high school core. With respect to social studies, I recommend that the core requirement read:

“Three credits of social studies including a credit of American History and a half credit each of American Government, economics, and world studies”. World studies could include world history, world geography and/or global issues.”

There are several reasons to make this change.

First, including world studies as a more general term was recommended by the State Superintendent but was changed at the board table.

Second, Michigan has secondary geography standards and does not have world history standards. To require world history and eliminate world geography would be to require a course for which there are no standards, and eliminate courses which meet current standards. Across Michigan, schools have expended tremendous efforts, and achieved considerable success in aligning their curricula with state content standards. To make a sudden change at this point, unsupported by any data, at least with respect to geography, is to make exactly the kind of change that breeds cynicism in schools.

Third, there is a significant and potentially disruptive personnel issue. Teachers currently teaching world geography have either interdisciplinary social studies certification or geography certification. If the course title is changed to world history, then teachers with a geography certification are not certified to teach the course.

Last, we have substantial experience, and research, to show that the “integration” strategy won’t work, and certainly won’t work for the high school geography content standards the state has. History uses the past to help understand the present, has stronger links with political science and the humanities, and makes extensive use of reading historical documents. Geography uses the present to help understand the future, has stronger links with economics and the sciences, and makes more use of interpreting and manipulating data. If the state wants to strengthen world history, the appropriate and cost effective way to do it is to develop world history content standards, which can be integrated into 6th and 7th grade western and eastern hemisphere courses, or into American history.

The simple change of world history to world studies is an important one, and I urge you to consider it.

I would also like to make three additional points about the high school core and school reform in general.

First, get more information about how the core requirements will link with the middle school curriculum. For example, many districts require algebra 1 in 8th grade. As I understand the current proposal, 8th grade algebra 1 would not count toward the core. At a minimum, algebra 1 taken in middle school should reduce the high school mathematics requirements by one credit.

Second, while the state has an increasingly important leadership role, it is also important to respect appropriate district and parental decision-making. The Detroit school district thinks they have excellent educational and political reasons for developing an African centered social studies curriculum in line with state content standards. Holland has equally good educational and political reasons for taking a different path. In addition, if the state passes a very prescribed curriculum, you will find yourself talking to parents angry because their talented novice scientist can't take AP Physics, and is having his or her scholarship chances lowered by a low grade in a required foreign language course, at the same time that you will be hearing from parents angry that their budding linguist is failing chemistry and can't take Spanish 4. Surely you want those parents talking to their school board members not to their state legislators.

Third, in any change, it is important to plan for sustainability from the beginning. The federal government is not the only level of government that can issue unfunded mandates. The new academic requirements may well decimate vocational education enrollment and staffing. In addition, the requirement of two years of foreign language, which was added at the State Board meeting against the recommendation of the superintendent, with absolutely no data about the potential cost, will likely break many schools budgets, will be difficult to implement in a four year time frame, and will almost certainly require laying-off staff in other areas. If you want to establish a foreign language requirement, you might allow it to substitute for one of the other requirements, at least during a transition time. For example, you might require four units of high school mathematics *or* three units of mathematics *and* one unit of foreign language.

Thank you for your time.

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Results of Michigan Geographic Alliance High School Core Curriculum Questionnaire

(Results of 189 responses received by December 20, 2005 to questionnaires sent to 600 Michigan high school principals.)

1. While Michigan requires only one semester of civics, my district requires more than the minimum. My district requires _____ semesters of social science courses in high school,

1-3	14 schools
4-5	19 schools
6	128 schools
More than 6	28 schools

specifically including the following requirements for all students. (Number of semesters required):

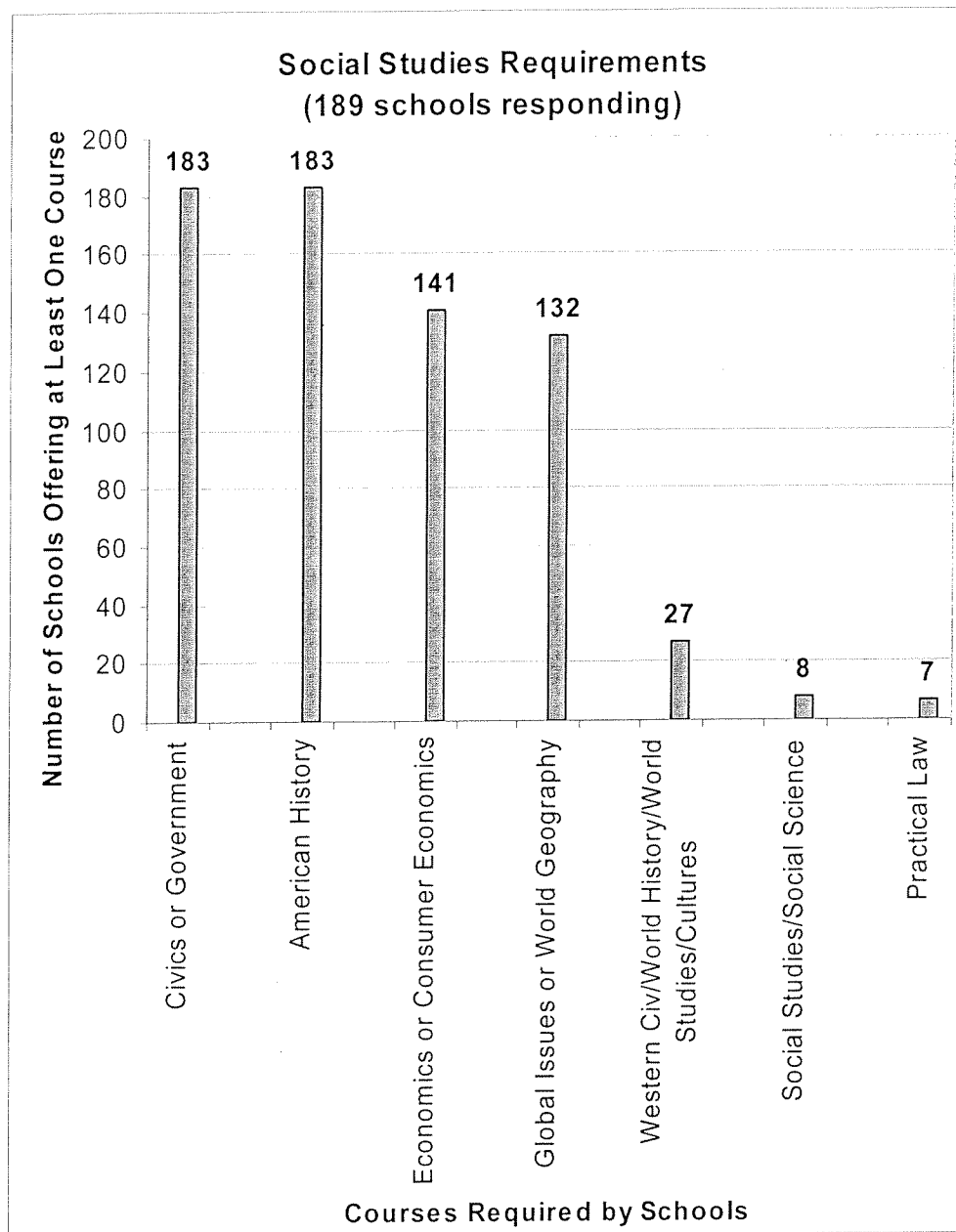
a. civics/government	½ (5)	1 (144)	2 (32)	3 (2)	
b. American history		1 (42)	2 (136)	3 (4)	4 (1)
c. economics	½ (6)	1 (114)	2 (11)		
d. global issues	½ (2)	1 (38)	2 (19)		
e. world geography	½ (3)	1 (43)	2 (27)		
f. practical law		1 (5)	2 (2)		
g. consumer econ.		1 (9)	2 (1)		
h. other required courses include:					
world studies/cultures		1 (6)	2 (3)		
western/world civ.		1 (2)	2 (2)		
world history		1 (7)	2 (7)		
social studies/science		1 (5)	2 (3)		

(Michigan history, US geography, contemporary issues, senior studies, as well as geography and economics each were mentioned once for one semester. Sociology/psychology was mentioned twice for one semester.) *Data is summarized on the following page.*

electives	½ (2)	1 (28)	2 (13)	3 (3)
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(Electives were overwhelmingly from the courses above, sometimes with a restricted choice such as world history *or* world geography. Other elective courses included AP courses, American criminal justice, and human geography.)

NOTE: The questionnaire asked for semesters, but some schools reported in credits (one credit typically equals two semesters). When it was clear (such as a school saying they required 3 semesters, and then checked six semesters of specific requirements) credits were changed to semesters. The ½ semesters may be additional cases of reporting credits, but it was not clear. Courses with similar titles, (such as civics, government, and US government) were combined into one category.



2. **By the way, we already integrate world history by including: (check if appropriate)**

- a. **63** 20th century world history in our American History course.
- b. **69** ancient civilizations in our 6th /7th grade western/eastern hemisphere courses.

The “who to blame” cycle

I am more concerned about the math requirements.

*The more Social Studies, the better in my mind. A geography class would be ok

Although I do agree w/state requirements of World History/World Geography for a year as we are a world economic system and (students should) know and be familiar with this material.

3. **The social studies proposal is very specific about how many hours of social studies are required**

and which courses should be taken. My opinion of the proposal is best described as: (Check all that apply.)

- a. **32** Finally - a clear set of academically rigorous courses that will help us raise academic standards. Brilliant! Thank you!
- b. **87** Rigor is fine, but so is flexibility. I have a range of staff, curriculum and scheduling issues. Requiring three units of social studies is fine, but beyond a year of American History and a semester of civics, it's important to have flexibility.
- c. **51** The skills, interests, and backgrounds of my students range widely. Some are ready for advanced placement by their junior year, and some desperately need a course in practical law before they learn it on the street. Decisions made at the district level (within a flexible state framework) will be more effective in responding to the entire range of students.
- d. **47** Not again. We've just spent years adapting to content standards and MEAP assessment, and have been making some progress. Now those are being replaced with ACT and a return to a core curriculum. Does someone up there think we don't have enough to do?
- e. **20** Other (Describe)

Currently do not have a "High Qualified" Teacher in economics. We will have to lay off one Social Studies teacher to hire an Economics teacher (if available)

The state standards in Social Studies are finally in line w/ what we already require Social Studies in Social Science. It's a wash.

We require 3 credits of Social Studies: 1 credit for US History, 1 credit for World Geography, ½ credits for Government, ½ credits

We're on the block schedule (3 semesters equals 3 credits)

We would have to incorporate world history into our world cultures class.

We just put in place global studies (world geography) because our MEAP scores were so low in this area. Please let us keep this class!!

In a global society Geography needs to be taught as an independent class!

I'm just grateful they're not proposing anything that we're not already doing.

High qualified – bah humbug. I have dedicated, educated, conscientious teachers doing a remarkable job in social studies. My students' MEAP results do show that our kids are learning better than the state average without a major in social studies.

One size does not fit all – same can be said for each of the curricular area requirements.

We still believe it could be better developed. Are we choosing the "most essential" classes to be required?

World History (sophomore) following a year (1 semester each) of U.S. Geography and (freshman) U.S. History (2 semesters) as a junior, U.S. Government (with economics as a vital topic, inclusive) as a senior.

Need grade level content expectations (by course)

Our Social Studies curriculum is very close to the proposed state requirements. We are pleased with the addition of economics.

The proposed standards do vary greatly from our current curriculum with the exceptions of geography and world history. My staff is recommending a global studies class at the 9th grade level that incorporates world history with geography and an introduction to economics principles.

Great choice. (d was circled)

Strongly feel that econ should be required especially “practical” econ to help the young learn how to be financially responsible adults.

Government, Economics, U.S. History and World Geography/History Perhaps more English/Language Arts and less Social Studies judging by the grammar in this paragraph!

We already offer a wide range of Social Studies courses.

We currently require three years of Social Studies. MI History/World Geography -9th grade, Civics/? Usually Economics 11th grade and World History is a senior elective.

Most like be some flexibility is good – we have options like Psychology, Integrated Social Studies for freshman, Consumer Economics, Current Events to.

Since we don’t offer World History it will take fine time to create and money! Neither of which we have abundance of. Schools need more time to incorporate the changes.

I would say “stay on the course” if I knew what that was...

4. If the proposed social studies curriculum is passed, I will undertake the following with respect to integrating geography into world and US history. (Check all that apply.)

- a. 33 I will announce the new policy, file my comments in the “cover my administration” file, assign the problem to our curriculum committee, and check it off my list.
- b. 48 I will provide our world history teachers with release time and provide additional resources to purchase curriculum resources to support integration of geography. I will pay for wonderful organizations like the Michigan Geographic Alliance to come to my school to do workshops and/or provide travel support for my teachers to attend professional development conferences to improve their knowledge. I will establish a review procedure to make sure integration is working.
- c. 48 I will make hiring new social studies teachers with competence in history and geography my top priority, in the unlikely event that I have any positions to fill.
- d. 44 Other (Describe)

We’re almost compliant now; we may have to eliminate a 60’s History class and replace with World History.

We will make alterations to our current Social Studies I and Social Studies II courses as needed. Resources will be made available as resources become available – minimal amounts of release time will be made available.

Already in a 10th grade course that covers world geography, history, and current events.

Salute and drive on!

Work with social studies Department to find appropriate materials.

We will comply, but obviously budget constraints will prevent choice B from happening.

It is incumbent on our school leadership to be complete team players. At times this may mean sacrificing a part (geography) for the whole.

I will continue with our current curriculum.

Some P.D!!!

I will keep world geography class required at 9th grade. American History at 10th grade, Econ I and Gov't at 11th grade and add World History at 12th grade. Half of our students take this class now. I would only have to add 2 more sections.

Make certain that teachers teach to the GLCs.
This would be my first choice – but funding is an issue.

Our students will lose opportunities we now offer in social studies and we will need to hire additional staff to meet NCLB highly qualified language.

Other than world history, I'm in good shape.

We will review what is taught in our geography class and decide where and when it would fit in the scope & sequence of U.S. & World History. We would utilize the expertise of our geography teachers to assist with this transition.

My school meets the recommended curriculum at this time.

Our current World Geography teacher would teach World History and he is totally competent. We have a wealth of resources for his use.

Ha!

I won't change anything.

We are small school that doesn't offer a lot of electives in the social science.

Combination of the two A and C.

World History teachers already integrate some geography into the curriculum as do U.S. History teachers. The integration will need to be more deliberate and intentional under the proposal.

If our budget allows, I will include item "b" along with c and d as well.

I have staff already meeting the requirements.

I would like to do better (b) but with funding so tight, it would be difficult.

I would like to do item b, but economic realities make that impossible.

We already integrate geography into world and U.S. history.

Work with teachers to re-do their class standards and align whatever is needed.

We believe we are solid with respect to change in standards.

I will struggle – once again. I would to do b and c, but we have no money for either.

Try to meet the requirements by hiring a qualified teacher.

We offer geography as a separate class.

See who may be certified/Qualified to teach each section – work with Social Studies Department to make it work.

I will encourage the inclusion of geography into American History and our World Studies class. We currently offer geography as one of our social studies electives.

Continue to offer geography as a requirement.

Do what we are doing now.

We have just completed K-12 curriculum review included the geography standard.

Go back to teaching World History and incorporate world geography in it due to “Highly Qualified Standards” and I don’t have anyone “Highly Qualified” in geography. I will still have to let go a veteran teacher in order to hire someone to teach economics.

Will not be affected as we already have this course in place.

We are a small district. I have one high school social studies teacher. He basically teaches all areas of social studies now. We will adjust.

Wait a year and jump on the next bandwagon.

It is already integrated.

We will further integrate geography in our US and World History courses and provide needed PD.

Time and resources will be given to help incorporate the needed curriculum changes.

I will provide social science faculty with the time to revise/create appropriate curriculum and to purchase necessary resources.

Make Civics/Economics into a full year, adding in Geography.

Our Social Studies teacher has already come up with our improvement plan. Lack of money, however, means we cannot hire. Lack of money very much limits the carrying out of any improvement. We are hoping to avoid further cutbacks this year and next.

Use the rest of this page or additional pages to make whatever comments you think the Michigan Board of Education should see. All comments will be typed and included with the data summary. Thanks for your response.

As is the case with most High Schools the Michigan Merit Core is already in place for graduation requirements. The extra year of math is ok, science will become really hard for a lot of students, and problems with social science will be the Certified and Highly Qualified Requirements.

Where do I find the money to buy new sets of textbooks? My school operates on a shoestring now. Our enrollment increases and my teaching staff shrinks through required lay-offs to balance the budget.

We all ready require Geography and expand upon the skills in world history programs. We currently offer this as elective but are perusing making this program required.

11th grade social studies cut score must be realized and comparable to the other MEAP tests.

Does any company make a World History book and materials appropriate for World History at the 9th grade level? Who will pay for the new textbooks (plus those for other new, required courses)?

How can we have World History as a required course, when there are no world history contents standards? World Geography is much more important than world history!

Would it be ideal to satisfy every interest? Yes. But that is not the reality. Should our system provide our students with necessary prerequisites for success (reading at grade level, writing at grade level, etc.) so that students at the secondary level could have more options and courses in areas outside of the core of math, English, and science could be more specific in nature. Not having these conditions in place requires us to give up other areas as luxuries.

For us, math is the biggest issue.

One "Fine Arts" credit for all students will not work! We are a small rural community and some of our students hate the arts! 36% of our students participate in the "arts" curriculum presently. I will have to add more staff. They take woodworking, CAP and cabinetry! I'm okay 3 credits of math, Science we are doing this now. English we will add 2 more sections at the 12th grade level to meet this requirement. This is okay.

I believe that World Geography should be a class on its own (one or two semesters).

My school is very small and staffing will become more of a problem as I need to replace retiring staff.

Last year the legislature approved an ACT-like test to be used to measure High School Proficiency. This measure was strongly supported by principles across the state. Using a test like ACT/SAT brings relevance, reliability and timely reporting to the high school proficiency test. If a state wide core curriculum is deemed necessary – fine. If course level expectations are deemed necessary – fine. But don't define education of our students to the point of cookie cutter education – leave enough leeway for control and don't extend the testing beyond the ACT or we have back student/parent indifferences

Integrate Geography into Global Studies/World History

No Child Left Behind highly qualified rules truly restrict any flexibility in social studies. Please respect the old certification.

Scramble to make things fit and work.

A bit of A and B (little if any money to purchase, but allow some time on professional development days). The semester of economics is the part that concerns me...that means there will be almost none for a social studies elective, when you consider all of the other electives.

I will smile inwardly for we are already complying with this latest unfunded mandate – should it really come to pass.

The proposed Social Studies recommendation does not alarm me. The nonsensical means by which it found its way to the state's school board, however, does. There is no merriment with joy.

It is so frustrating. 23% of our populations are identified as special education. Are they going to do well on the ACT and merit exam? Is every kid going to college? It's not just social studies – it's math and science, too!

If you send out a humorous questionnaire you may not get an accurate response!

Geography will be written into the curriculum as specific activities and we'll hope it gets covered.

I will make very little changes, other than being sure World Geography is taught as an integrated content item each year.

We have a 3 year requirement – 1 yr. US History, 1 yr. Civics and Econ, 1 yr. Law and Personal Econ. – I would recommend adding World Geography.

Don't need help from state or other outside assistance.

I believe that there should be more emphasis in the social studies curriculum on Global issues and World Geography.

Do our best to meet the increasing demands

I really believe our teachers in World and U.S. History are doing this today.

All of these options are ridiculous. Please be serious if you are sending out a survey.

I grow weary of mandates aimed at "raising the bar" when I already have teachers stretched to the max. Moreover they, the teachers, are discouraged by the constant bombardment of inadequacy. I also hate producing students who have to fit into a mold that is decided by the government. Honestly, as soon as I can retire, I will.

Some of all of the above. I will announce the new policy. I will provide Professional Development and resources for our staff. I will be hiring a new Social Studies teacher next year and I will do my best to get someone proficient in these new areas. We currently require 3 social studies credits. We already offer many topics covered in the new recommendations. I believe we are (now) a global society and students need lessons/knowledge regarding the world. But with all the "Highly Qualified" concerns, scheduling concerns and lack of resources, I would hate to see the demands become too rigid. The definition of stress is, "the predicament of having limitless demands with limited resources." We are already there! Don't make it any worse!

The geographic knowledge exhibited by American students is criminal in its ignorance. Geography is the FIRST important influence on history and the development of cultures on this planet and we give such short shrift to those monumental influences that it is all but senseless to teach it. We MUST do better.

Since we already provide electives in World History and psychology, the change would not be significant. However, the flexibility to offer other Social Studies courses will become more difficult if we require a change to

our current curriculum. My thoughts are keep the civics (government) requirement and then allow the options to schools to fill the three credit requirement in the way they feel best meets the standards that will be set with state testing.

We have a World History program in place, but it has never been fully offered to the students because of a lack of staff. We would have to get rid of our psychology elective or hire new staff members.

I am very concerned that the mandated changes in the proposal will require us to hire additional staff in some content areas either due to meeting highly qualified standards or to offer additional courses and that the funds will not be there to adequately supply the classrooms.

I can see the state board establishing minimum standards in the (unlikely) event that some school, somewhere, only requires civics to graduate.

World History should be reversed with Geography. That is, Geography should be required to be taught while World History could be integrated. Thanks for asking for my opinion!

Most schools in Michigan have requirements way beyond the states requirements. Local schools make diplomas important and valuable to each and every student.

I am not sure all students realistically fall into a 4-4-3-3 standard. I am a working class district where hands-on activities produce results and hands-on classes are fully populated.

I don't mind standards and guidelines – in fact I like them. However, I think we need flexibility to match the needs of students.

The real concerns are math and science, not Social Studies. I do wonder where World History came from since not in MEAP/Benchmarks but we have always felt it important and have required it for ~10 years.

Because Geography has already been integrated into other courses, we will be spending time realigning those courses in order to comply with these guidelines. We're not excited. As a social studies person, I am not happy about requiring world history. We need some flexibility as to what we cover. Mandating geography integrated into an AP U.S. History is not a solution.

Our student body/community is 60-70% non college bound. They go to work or, at best, one or two year programs at OCC. They don't need and, more importantly, can't meet the demands of the proposed core curriculum. This has already been proven with two years of failing to meet AYP. What happens to our students, our staff, our school??

Everyone is not capable of going to college – nor can they pay for it. Why can't the state set up a realistic curriculum for these students and help us to prepare them for a world of work?

Geography is a very important subject to require especially in the global world environment we live in economically and politically. Our problem is that we are on block scheduling and our school district will only allow 3 credits in Social Science...1 for America Government and 2 for American History. Our students, therefore, have huge gaps in their knowledge.

I believe that, in the current global environment, an understanding of world geography is more vital than knowledge of world history. Furthermore, as a veteran teacher with degrees in both history and geography and experience teaching both, I can assure you that students will generally find geography instruction more engaging (and therefore, more effective) than world history.

The state department should have clear expectations of what should be taught in each class.

Your survey's attempt at humor is off-base. I would be glad to contribute more constructive dialogue to an organization that does not excuse sarcasm. Thanks for the warning in the opening page.

This is a process. While I don't like All the specifics of this proposal, it is a starting point – we have students crawling over a low bar now. Stay professional in your dialogue. You are a professional organization aren't you????

I support the concept of increased graduation requirements and having a state mandated curriculum. Flexibility in meeting these requirements is crucial. As a former Social Studies Teacher who taught history and geography, I welcome this change.

Equal Funding to all schools would help! The amount per pupil is a wide gap and should not exist!

I just find this amazing. School districts have held more restrictive graduation requirements than the state mandated requirements. Now, because they are politically embarrassed we suddenly have this cry for tougher graduation requirements. This is so typical of people who are outside of the education business telling educators how to fix the problem. ----- Just wonderful.

We should include two additional semesters and make world history a requirement.

I support the new graduation requirements as originally proposed by Flannigan. I am opposed to adding two years of global issues and not allowing alternatives for fulfilling the PE/Health requirement. With a 6 period day my students would only have 4-6 periods of choice during their entire high school career.

I would like a delay, of five years, for making the Social Studies MME really count. Please allow us time to carry out our improvement plans and see the results in the upcoming students.

I am already working with teachers in all departments to redesign our curriculum. I have discussed it at staff meetings and requested proposals from all department heads by 12/14. We have also met at the district level Superintendent, curriculum director, high school principal, assistant principal, middle school principal.

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